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From: Hutchinson, Marcella
Sent: Thur 8/6/2015 6:59:07 PM
Subject: FW: [West Slope] Animas River fouled by 1 million gallons in contaminated mine water

FYI – Wow

From: west-slope@googlegroups.com [mailto:west-slope@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of**
Loretta Lohman
Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 12:39 PM
To: west-slope@googlegroups.com
Subject: [West Slope] Animas River fouled by 1 million gallons in contaminated mine water

THE DENVER POST

Animas River fouled by 1 million gallons in contaminated mine water

Durango residents warned to cut back on water use as EPA, local health officials evaluate river

By Jesse Paul
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/06/2015 11:27:26 AM MDT [4 Comments](#) | Updated: 2 min. ago



Health and environmental officials in San Juan County are evaluating the Animas River after roughly 1 million gallons of mine waste water were released Wednesday, August 6, 2015. (*Photo courtesy San Juan Basin Health Department*)

About 1 million gallons of mine wastewater spilled into a tributary of the Animas River in San Juan County, threatening water quality and prompting warnings to agricultural and recreational water users on Thursday.

Health and environmental officials are evaluating the river, and officials say the mine water is acidic and contains high levels of sediment and metals.

Downstream in Durango, where the water is expected to reach by 3 p.m., city officials are asking residents to cut back on their water use and irrigation of city land at local Fort Lewis College have been stopped.

Photos from the area showed the river's waters turned a thick, dark orange.

The water release was triggered Wednesday north of Silverton by the Environmental Protection Agency as it was investigating contamination at the abandoned Gold King Mine. The Colorado

Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety said they had been in the area in recent days. The EPA called the release "unexpected."

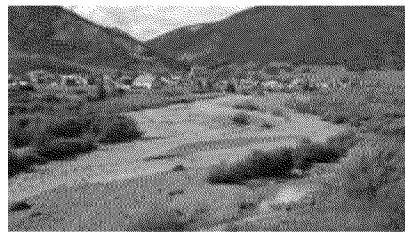
"There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed," the San Juan Basin Health Department said in a news release Thursday.

The water spilled into the upper portions of Cement Creek, officials say. The fluid was being held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal.

"The EPA recommends that recreational users of the Animas River avoid contact with or use of the river until the pulse of mine water passes," the release said.

All agricultural water users have been notified to shut off water intake, officials say, and pet owners have been told to keep their dogs and livestock out of the Animas River until further testing is done.

Steve Salka, utilities manager for the city of Durango, said he pulls water from the Animas in the summer to help replenish the Terminal Reservoir. He said while the city's main water source is another river, the contamination could cause serious problems.



An orange-colored discharge of sediment and minerals makes it way down the Animas River-Cement Creek junction about 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in Silverton, about eight miles downstream from a blowout at the Gold King Mine in San Juan County. The contamination had made its way to Bakers Bridge in La Plata County as of Thursday morning. (*Courtesy of Michael Constantine via The Durango Herald*)

"I want to know what's in it," he said Thursday in an interview. "The most important thing is what's in it. I need to know."

"Back in the 1800's, things were used in mining that aren't allowed anymore," he added.

The EPA says due to current and longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals in Cement Creek, there are no fish populations. Further, federal officials say, the Animas River has historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton.

"We are monitoring the situation very closely and working with the EPA to get testing results to make sure we minimize any health impacts," said Flannery O'Neil, spokeswoman for the area's health department.

Joe Lewendowski, spokesman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Durango said biologists are completing testing the area.

"Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists are monitoring the impacts to the fish and other wildlife in the Animas River," he said.

The Animas is a 126-mile river that flows into the San Juan River in Farmington, N.M. The San Juan eventually reaches the Colorado River in Utah.



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